

CHILDREN OF THEIR FATHERS

827 garden was not required of most Ngoni women, though they
577 were expected to know by experience how to hoe and to
pound, to mud walls and to clean a house in order to super-
vise their helpers and to see that household work was done
efficiently.

577 In addition to being healthy, the ideal Ngoni woman was
581 always well-groomed. She might lack the facial formation
of high cheek-bones, narrow nose and deep-set eyes and the
● [926] light bronze colouring which were the accepted standards
of beauty. Even without these natural, usually inherited,
advantages she spent, as we have seen, much time every day
[302] taking care of her skin and hair. When she was receiving
visitors or sitting outside her hut, her two long cloths, one
[291] fastened under the armpits and the other over one shoulder
and knotted on the chest, were carefully draped and
arranged. If she walked to another compound or out of the
village on the road, or walked or danced in any ceremony,
[516] her dignity of bearing and poise of head was always marked.
She did not hurry, but, as the Ngoni said, 'she walked
strongly'. A government official passing an octogenarian
[481] Ngoni princess on the road stopped and offered her a lift
in his car. She looked him up and down and said: 'Thank
you, young man. I can still walk.'

577 Many references have been made already to the relation-
ship between a wife and her husband, and between a wife,
602 especially a young one, and her husband's relatives. The
keynotes of this relationship were devotion to her husband,
respect for his relatives, and circumspection in her relations
with her co-wives and with her non-Ngoni helpers. Jealousy
between co-wives was recognized by the Ngoni but not
condoned, and the young wife at marriage was warned by
her own family against quarrelling with anyone, co-wives,
helpers or in-laws, though the last was almost unthinkable.

577 Competence in household management, being a success-
ful 'châtelaine', made many demands on a Ngoni woman if
992 she were to live up to what was considered an ideal house

[P.22]

CHAPTER III HUSBANDS AND WIVES

1. *The field of modern marriage*

581 **M**ARRIAGE nowadays among the Ngoni still regulates the sexual activities of man and wife and determines the responsibility for the care of their young children, the inheritance of their property, and succession to office. To a lesser extent it still determines residence and establishes relationships between a partner to the marriage and his or her affines. It is an institution which involves sooner or later almost every Ngoni man or woman who survives into adulthood. The number of people who die adult and unmarried is very small. Even albinos, who are regarded generally with disgust, usually succeed in marrying. The only people who fail to marry at all are: seriously crippled people who are regarded as not strong enough to look after themselves; a few prostitutes who acquire a reputation for wantonness before they have managed to find a husband and who live in a succession of temporary alliances with men in and around the township of Fort Jameson; and a category of persons known as 'quite useless people,'¹ that is, people who are mad or in some way deranged so that they are unable to settle down in any place and are always wandering about from village to village, begging shelter, beer and food.

• [56] 589 [548] [828] A man who does not marry, or who remains divorced or widowed for many years, is regarded as unusual, and others say of him that he must smell like a he-goat so that no woman will have him. A man in his twenties without a wife is laughed at by the married women, who despise him as impotent. Very few men in fact stay long without a wife, and of people whose personalities are regarded as normal it is only a few old widowers who do not have a wife to cook for them and sleep with them. Some women stay for longer without a husband, partly because of the numerical preponderance of women over men caused by labour migration.

[62] 128 101 [21] Some idea of the extent to which marriage affects everyone sooner or later is given by Tables III and IV. These tables, like all the others in this paper, are based on information collected systematically from six Ngoni villages. Two of these villages, containing 257 and 142 residents, situated twenty-five miles apart and in different counties, were selected for me to live in by the county chiefs concerned. The remaining four villages containing 143, 104, 55 and 45 residents, were close together but in a third county and twenty miles away from the other two.

¹ *Cisile, pi. vinda, or also Gweta Gwetaletyala. Cf. Nanga nile, pi. masile, ibid.*

643 thinking, and then all thundered the thanking together. This included all
 644 the rest who were in the neighbourhood though they did not take part in
 431 the food or the present. The leader would first thank 'E-Jere' and then all
 would follow together, 'E-Jere', or the clan name of the one who was the
 giver. The Paramount, if he gave presents to the people, was not thanked
 by his clan name as other people. He was thanked by 'Bayete' as was done
 when saluting him. Likewise those who received the title *Nhomo* were
 thanked by that title when they gave presents to people.

643 On ceremonial occasions, visitors to the royal village heard the
 644 *isibongo* or praise-songs of the Paramount. These were songs referring
 533 to great deeds and notable incidents both in the lifetime of the reigning
 576 Paramount and in the lives of his predecessors. They were distinct from
 the *isibongo*, which were honorific epithets added to the clan name and
 spoken when thanking a well-known man or woman for their gifts. The
isibongo could be said by anyone, since each person of note had his own
 which were well known. The *isibongo* could only be spoken or sung by
 an *umlongi* or official 'praiser'. Such a person was a man of good
 (526) memory and possessing eloquence. The chest was thought to be the seat
 of wisdom and eloquence, and a man who composed praise-songs, as
 distinct from repeating well-known ones, had to have the faculty of
 finding the right words, since new songs of this kind were generally
 invented on a sudden inspiration.

The occasions when the praise-songs were recited were when important visitors came to the royal village; when beasts were slaughtered in the ancestor cult; at special dances at the royal village or at the feasts of the Paramount. On such occasions the official praiser stood up in the kraal, everyone kept silence and did not move, and after a pause he began to call out '*Bayabongo inkosi*', 'let us praise the Paramount'. In repeating the praise-songs he began with those of the immediate ancestor of the Paramount, and then went on to those of earlier ancestors. At the end he shouted '*Bayete*' and all the people replied '*Bayete*'. Examples of the praise-songs of Zwangendaba and his father Hlacwayo of the northern kingdom and of Ngwana, father of Mputa, of the central Ngoni kingdom are given at the end of the chapter.

643 The tension caused by the extreme formality in the behaviour of the
 644 Paramount, his courtiers and his visitors was lightened by the presence
 522 of a court jester. Informants were agreed that such an individual was
 usually present to amuse the Paramount with his sallies and gestures and
 clown-like tumbling about. Dr. Laws referred to such a jester at the
 court of Mbelwa I when the Livingstonia Mission was making its first
 settlement in northern Ngoniland.¹ I saw a jester who came with Para-
 mount Zintambira Maseko from Portuguese territory when he and his
 officials visited Mankhacha for the war-dance at the mourning for Bambo

¹ Livingstonia, W. F. Laws of Livingstonia. London, Hutter & Broughton, 1921, p. 100.

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863 of dust, and many of them began to suffer from sores, itch and sore eyes. The girls however, had already begun to like a clean and shining skin for the sake of being beautiful, and their ablutions were no longer under duress.

The smallest children urinated and defecated wherever they happened to be. From the age of three or four, however, they were taught to tell someone if they wanted to defecate, and taken outside the hut. Maize cobs or soft leaves or grass were used to clean the child, and then thrown on the fire. When the child began to look after himself, he was

• [826] shown how to use the left hand only when cleaning himself, and told it was 'the hand of shame, only used for bad things'.

[514] From the age of four or five small girls and boys went with their mothers and the other women to the section of the surrounding bush reserved for the women's toilet. At about the same age boys and girls were taught to withdraw from the public gaze when urinating, and to conceal themselves behind a hut or in some other hiding-place. The Ngoni were [514] extremely prudish about all physical acts connected with [834] evacuating or sex, and began to demand correct behaviour from children at an early age.

757 If a child was constipated, or had diarrhoea, or was vom-
603 iting, or had a fever or stomach-ache, the nurse girl reported it to his mother who went to tell the child's paternal grandmother. For all the range of usual childish ailments the grandmother prescribed and carried out standard treatments, such as whey used as a purgative, or very thin gruel to check diarrhoea. The Ngoni women had a number of herbal remedies which they used for themselves and their children. They also used hot poultices, cupping, and forms of massage. Only when the known household remedies failed, did the grandmother tell the child's father and he, as we have seen, took the responsibility for calling in 'specialists'.

867 Sleep, the little child's third major need, was sometimes
864 well ordered and sometimes erratic. It was not considered proper for children to sleep in the same hut as their parents